

*Advanced Theatre Play*  
*Haenyeo, the Sea Woman*



***CAST***

*Olivia: Soonja*  
*Eric: Choonje*  
*Michelle: Malsook*  
*John: Malbong*  
*Lydia: Narrator*

**< Scene 1 >**

*Scene begins with spotlight only on the left corner of stage. The setting is a small room with a closet and some clothes on the floor. Lydia enters and begins to go through her old clothes. She finds a diving suit and appears to reminisce. She then holds the diving suit to her chest and speaks.*

Lydia: Ah there you are. Hello old friend. I remember you well. How many wonderful and difficult times we had together. *(smiling)* Why I still remember the day I got you. God knows I didn't want you back then. But I was young... innocent, and frankly... a little naive. I never knew how much you would change my life. Forever.

**< Scene 2 >**

*Lights lower, a new scene appears on stage. Soonja (the younger Lydia) is walking along a pier looking around at the scenery. She has a piece of paper in her hand and looks as if she is following directions.*

Soonja: *(looking around with the paper in her hand)* Where the hell am I? What is this place? Hello! Is anyone here?

*A man is in a boat on the water. He is dressed like a sailor (with a white shirt, white shorts, and a white hat). He looks over to Soonja, looks her up and down, smiles to himself and calls her over, winking.*

Choonje: *(with a shrimp tail dangling on his mouth)* Hey beautiful. You look lost. Looking for your umma?

Soonja: *(blushing)* Oh, hello. Umm, do you know where I am right now?

Choonje: *(smiling greasily)* Your sweetest dream. Hahaha. Hey, did it hurt?

Soonja: Did what hurt?

Choonje: When you fell from heaven?

Soonja: *(giggling)* Oh. *(she blushes deeply)* Well. Of course it did.

Choonje: So... you got a name? Or shall I just call you gorgeous?

Soonja: *(Stifling a giggle at the comment)* No, I do have a name. My name is Soonja, but you can call me what you like.

Choonje: Hahaha, Soonja, what a beautiful name! I'm Choonje. And you can call me what you like too. *(he laughs)*

Soonja: Then shall I call you ... my captain? *(blushing)*

Choonje: Hahaha, then I'll call you my little sunshine. *(leans forward)* So ... wanna hang out for a while?

Soonja: *(giggling)* Yes. But I need to see someone first. It looks like I'll be working here.

Choonje: Well you're far too young, and far too gorgeous to be a haenyo. I've never seen one like you. You're like a delicate little flower that needs a gardener - like me. *(laughs)* Well I guess the only one who would know where to put you is Malsook. She's been a haenyo for over thirty years. If anyone knows, it's her. *(He gestures to the off stage "crowd".)* She's over there.

Soonja: Thanks. *(Michelle starts to go.)*

Choonje: Hey wait! Come back soon beautiful. I can't afford to lose you. *(Choonje winks at her and Michelle giggles)*

*An aging woman of around 50 enters the stage with a haenyeo suit in her hands*

Malsook: Ignore him. I'm Malsook. You must be Soonja. Your mother said you were in desperate need of growing up. And I can clearly see why.

Soonja: My mom's mistaken. You don't need to waste your time trying to teach me to grow up. I'm definitely a grown up.

Malsook: Oh, really? Let's see how you do in the sea today then. Holding your breath underwater for 2 minutes, what about that?

Soonja: I can do it just fine! I aced swimming class at school.

Malsook: Oh, this is no swimming class, honey. By the way, that captain boy is looking at you. You'll be growing up the wrong way if you don't put an end to this. *(points to Choonje. Choonje is waving and winking at Soonja)* Stay away from him. He's bad news kid.

Soonja: Choonje is a sweet guy. I've never seen anyone as sweet and handsome as him! *(waves at Choonje. Choonje waves back)* Oh, look! He's waving back at me!

Malsook: Fine. I guess you'll just have to learn from experience. Boys like that *(pointing at Choonje)* will ruin your life. Trust me, that's what my husband was like when he was your age.

And now ... *(puts up her hands as if choking someone, then growls)* forget it! *(throwing the suit at Soonja)* Get your suit on. We're going to work right away. *(gets close to Soonja's face)* And don't think you can get away with not working hard!

*Soonja casts a glance at Choonje, who winks back at her. She giggles and exits stage. Choonje walks over. He stands next to Malsook.*

Choonje: Hey. I should thank you. You gave me something to look at while I work. *(puts his tongue out)* Fresh meat.

Malsook: *(Malsook reaches out and grabs Choonje by the scruff of the neck)* Mess this one up for me and I'll wring more than just your neck boy!

*Lights go off with Choonje's startled expression.*

Narration: That was my first encounter with Malsook. Even at first glance, I could tell a lot of things about her. The scratches on her arms and legs told you she's been with the sea for quite some time. The wrinkles on her forehead told you she's met countless storms in her life. And the deepness of her voice told you she was a wise, determined woman. *(pause)* But above all, there was this unknown sadness in her eyes. A sadness that I couldn't explain.

### < Scene 3 >

*Scene changes to Malsook's house. The house is small and simple and appears to be "poor". Malbong, Malsook's husband is drunk with 10 soju bottles around him. Malsook enters the house looking dead tired.*

Malsook: What a long day. *(She sees Malbong singing with 10 soju bottles surrounding him. Malbong is drunk, making a scene of himself by dancing around the house.)*

Malsook: Again... *With a sigh she starts picking up the soju bottles.*

Malbong: Malsook-ah! Guess how many bottles of soju I had today!

Malsook: I don't wanna know.

Malbong: *(puts up his finger, makes an 8)* TEN!!! I had 10 bottles today! HEEHEEHEE!

Malsook: Shut up.

Malbong: *(points his finger at her)* Uh huh! How dare you talk to your husband like that! *(wavers his finger)* Bad Malsook, bad Malsook. HEEHEEHEE!

Malsook: *(trying to pick up a bottle next to him)* Move.

Malbong: Oh, watch me, watch me. *(starts dancing, laughing)* What do you think? It's a new dance I made today! I'm telling you, this dance is gonna be famous in the future!

Malsook: *(explodes)* I SAID MOVE!

Malbong: *(all of a sudden lies down on the floor, starts talking like a baby)* AHHHH! I'm hungry! Make me food!

*Malsook takes one look at Malbong and with a sigh walks back to the kitchen area. Malbong is on the floor of the living room, now sleeping. As she is cooking, she silently starts to cry.*

Malsook: *(Spotlight on Malsook. She picks up a soju bottle)* It's you. You're the one that made my husband like that! You're the one that took my husband away from me! He wasn't always like this, you know. And now, because of you, all he ever does is drink. Drink, drink, and drink! I'm so sick and tired of everything! I ... I just can't take it anymore. I always think to myself that he'd change someday, but, really ... I know that he won't. *(starts crying) (after a while, stops her crying)* You know, when I'm at work, the whole 2 minutes while I'm underwater, the only thing on my mind is if my husband had his lunch. As I reach my 20 meter limit, all I think about is if I don't come out alive, what will happen to him. Would he miss me? *(pause for a while, starts laughing)* No...He probably loves this more *(Malsook holds up the soju. She starts to cry)*. You know, there are times when I don't want to avoid those jellyfish and sharks. Times when I don't want to come out of the water. Times when I just want to give up on this life. *(looks at the soju bottle, starts laughing)* Silly right? Talking to a soju bottle. *(pause)* At least you can listen. My husband can't even do that. *(starts crying, head down)*

*Malbong is mumbling something in the background.*

Malsook: *(silently picks up her knife, wipes her tears, continues chopping the vegetables. She is still crying, light slowly goes off)*

Narration: I never knew where that unknown sadness in Malsook's eyes came from. I never knew it was her husband, the man she had to bear for 32 years - the man she could not leave for 32 years. He was a secret she kept from everyone around her - not because she was embarrassed of him, but because she was embarrassed of herself not being able to leave him. I never knew the sadness in her eyes came from this secret that she had to bear for 32 years.

#### < Scene 4 >

*Scene changes to next morning, at the beach. The sun is shining brightly and Soonja is watching along the shore with her haenyeo suit in her hands. Choonje is watching Soonja from far away.*

Soonja: Where is everyone? God, I hate the weather today! *(looks up)* I hate being a haenyeo! I hate everything everything! Gahhh ... *(she turns around, sees Choonje)* *(drastically changing her voice)* Oh, hello!

Choonje: Good morning, my little sunshine! Isn't the weather beautiful today?

Soonja: Yes, the weather is so beautiful today. The sun is shining so brightly and the sea is sparkling like little diamonds!

Choonje: This kind of weather doesn't come by everyday. I suppose the weather only shines when beautiful flowers like you come out to work.

Soonja: *(chuckling)* Oh, I love coming to work! Being a henyeo is all I've ever wanted to do!

Choonje: *(leaning over)* Well, being with you is all I've ever wanted to do!

*(Malsook shows up and hits Choonje in the head)*

Malsook: *(to Choonje, close to his face)* What did I tell you yesterday? I think I warned you not to get your dirty hands on her, huh?

Choonje: Yes, mam. I'll go to work! *(scared, quickly walks back to his boat)*

Malsok: Soonja, you follow me! *(walks to exit)*

Soonja: *(to Choonje)* I'll see you later, my captain! Wait here! *(follows Malsook to exit)*

Choonje: *(waving back at Soonja)* Be back soon, my little sunshine!

*(At the market)*

Malsook: Come and look everyone! Here's some just caught fresh sea food! Soonja!

Soonja: *(unwillingly)* Come and look people... We got fish here...

*(Malbong enters the market. He is drunk again, dancing and singing in the market, making a scene)*

Malbong: Malsook! Look, I learned a new dance today from my friend here. *(points to his soju bottle and starts dancing)*

Malbong: *(Trying to drag Malsook)* Malsook! Look at me! What do you think! Heeheehee!

Malsook: I do not know you, mister.

Malbong: You liar! You know me! You know me! I'm your husband! *(throws the fish that Malsook was selling)* Ahh!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

< Scene 5 >

*Malbong is still creating a mess, and people around him are staring at him.*

Malsook: *(silent for a while, suddenly packs her things)* Let's get out of here. *(grabs Soonja harshly by the wrist)*

*The two women are outside the market, Malsook suddenly stops walking and looks down.*

Soonja: *(looking carefully at Malsook)* What's wrong? Are you okay?

Malsook: It's none of your business.

Soonja: *(hears Malbong creating a mess)* Is that someone you know?

Malsook: *(starts laughing and looks down)* 32 years. *(looks up)* It's someone I've known for 32 years. *(laughing)* Funny, right? You never thought I'd be living with a man like that, right? Same for me, I never thought I'd be living with a man like that - that I would waste 32 years of my life with that **bastard!** *(yells)* *(silent, all of a sudden shouting)* I had dreams, too, you know. When I was your age, I had my dreams too, like you! And it wasn't to jump in the sea every single day, **knowing** that I might die one day from an accident. Every morning, I take another step into the sea, when deep down in my mind, I'm shouting to myself that I don't wanna do it! And every single day is a battle of fear for me. I never tell anyone, because I want to appear strong, like the woman that everyone thinks I am, but the truth is, I'm so scared of the sea! I'm scared to death! But you know what's even scarier? *(silent)* Knowing that even if I just die one day, there won't be a single person to cry for me. Not even my husband.

Soonja: *(silent for a while)* Then why don't you just leave him?

Malsook: *(extremely emotional)* Because he's my husband. *(hand on chest, signifying the word "my")* **My** husband. Because he's the man I promised myself to love for the rest of my life, no matter what. *(sighs)* \* You don't understand. You don't understand. You're too young, innocent, and naive. But you know, someday, one day in your life, you'll come to understand why I can't leave my husband.

*(Malsook picks up her things and starts walking to exit stage)*

Soonja: So it doesn't matter to you - whether you die or not from a storm one day? from a shark? from a shipwreck? All that doesn't matter to you? Is your husband so important to you that you would risk your life for him? for a drunk bastard that doesn't even care about you?

Malsook: *(stops, without looking back)* You did well today. I'll see you tomorrow morning. *exits*

*(lights go off with Soonja left alone on stage, looking confused -> lights on Lydia)*

Narration: I was too young. I was too young to understand why Malsook couldn't leave her husband. I didn't understand why she loved a man that didn't love her anymore. I didn't understand why she tried to hide her fears from everyone else. And I didn't understand why she had to be a haenyeo if she hated it so much. Yes, I didn't understand a lot of things at the time. And I probably would have never come to understand her, had I not come to her house the next day.

## < Scene 6 >

*Scene shifts to next morning. Malsook is at home with Malbong, but Malsook is supposed to be at work. Malbong is in his bed, sick, and Malsook is in the kitchen, heating a towel for Malbong.*

Malbong: *(starts coughing hard)*

Malsook: *(enters the room with the towel. She sits down next to him)* You created a mess yesterday.

Malbong: *silent*

Malsook: *(places the towel on his head)* Why did you do that.

Malbong: *(silent for a while)* I needed more soju.

Malsook: *(gets up all of a sudden)* Soju? You did all that just for another bottle of soju?

Malbong: *(silent)* I feel sick.

Malsook: You know what? I'm sick too. I'm so sick. I've been sick for the last 32 years because of you. I'm sick of you! I'm sick of your soju! I'm sick and tired of everything! *(starts crying, puts her hand on her forehead)* Everyday, I go to work to jump into the sea knowing that I might die one day. Everyday, I come home, clean the house, and cook dinner. Everyday, I cry before I go to sleep, asking God what I ever did to deserve this. And I do all this because of you. Because I love you. Because I always think to myself that you'd change one day - that you'd become someone different someday. And we'll be happy together once again, like how we used to be. But really ... I don't know if I can take it anymore ... I can't take it anymore ... *(drops to the*



*floor*) Please, stop. Please come back to the person you used to be. The kind, loving man you were when I first met you. *(crying)*

Malbong: *(silent for a while)* I'm sorry.

Malsook: *(continues crying)*

Malbong: *(putting his hand on his forehead)* What happened to us. I don't know what happened to us. We used to love each other. We used to be so happy together. We used to have a perfect marriage. Oh, what happened to us. *(crying)*

You know, I remember the first time I saw you. You were so young, pretty, and kind - I really thought you were the most beautiful girl in the world. And when we got married, we were so happy together, as wife and husband. But few years later, when I lost my job, I felt like I lost all hope in myself. I felt so useless and dreadful. And when you said you'd become a haenyeo to make money, I couldn't hate myself more. I couldn't hate myself more for making my own wife risk her life to earn a living. *(picks up the soju bottle)* I think that's when I started drinking this. To forget about what kind of a miserable husband I was. *(starts crying)* It's all my fault. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry.

Malsook: *(patting Malbong's face)* Look at me. You were never a miserable husband, don't say that. You're the best man I know and the best I'll ever know.

Malbong: Don't say that. I don't deserve to be loved anymore.

Malsook: Of course I love you. *(takes Malbong by the face)* How can I not love you - you're my husband.

Malbong: I wasted your life for such a long time. I don't want to waste your life anymore. I ... I don't know how to turn our marriage back to what it used to be.

Malsook: You can't by yourself. But we can - together.

Malbong: I'm sorry *(wipes his tears)* I'll stop drinking soju. I'll look for a job. I'll help you with the housework. I'll try my best to become the man I used to be.

Malsook: *(patting Malbong)* Thank you.

*(light turns off and spotlight on Soonja, who is in front of the door. She has been hearing everything. Instead of calling Malsook out, Soonja stays silent)*

Narration: That's when I understood why the night before, Malsook said she couldn't leave her husband. Why thousands of other women couldn't leave their husbands. I realized that there

existed such a strong, unbreakable bond between all wives and husbands. That there existed something beyond love between them. That they gradually become companions over lovers. And it was that companionship beyond love that kept Malsook with her husband for 32 years, and thousands of other wives with their husbands, in spite of all the conflicts, clashes, and struggles. And that night, I finally came to understand her as a wife, woman, and a person.

< Scene 7 >

*Scene changes to next morning. Choonje is on his boat at the shore. Malsook and Soonja are on the boat in their suits. Choonje starts paddling.*

Choonje: Now, where are we going today, my ladies?

Malsook: We're going to the deepest part of the South Sea. *(to Soonja)* After all, my husband dumped everything we caught for a month yesterday. So we better start working our butt off.

Soonja: Oh ... Is he okay now?

Malsook: Much better than before. *(smiles)* I'm sorry I left you like that at the market the other day.

Soonja: No, it's fine. *(pause)* I'm sorry I asked you so many questions...

Malsook: Come here, I want to show you something. *(Soonja stands up on the boat and goes to Malsook)* Close your eyes and relax. Now, what do you hear?

Soonja: I ... I hear sea gulls crying...

Malsook: What else?

Soonja: ... And the waves splashing... and the wind blowing.

Malsook: Put your arms out. What do you feel?

Soonja: I feel the ... water splashing onto my arms ... and the breeze touching my cheeks.

Malsook: Now, I want you to open your eyes and tell me what you see.

Soonja: I see ... the sea, sparkling under the sun.

Malsook: Look down onto the sea. What do you see?

Soonja: I see ... myself. I see myself ... smiling.

Malsook: I know that you don't want to be a haenyeo. And I understand you to my bones because when I was your age, I didn't want to be a haenyeo either. But you see, there's still a beauty to this job - a beauty that can only be seen when you come to accept it from your heart. And that beauty is exactly what you just heard, felt, and saw. That's why I do this job. I know that there are so many dangers to this job, but I do it because of this beauty. And now, I want to show you that beauty.

Soonja: *(smiling)* It is beautiful. It really is. Thank you

Malsook: *(smiling)* You're welcome.

*Suddenly, the three see a giant lightning and hear a giant storm. It starts raining. The boat starts to move.*

Soonja: Oh god! What's going on?

Choonje: I have no idea! There isn't supposed to be a storm today! I checked the weather this morning!

Malsook: Choonje! Grab the anchor!

*The boat starts shaking viciously. The rain starts pouring even more.*

Soonja: Ack, help me!

Choonje: Hold on to me baby, I'll protect you!

Soonja: *(falls into the water)* Ack!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Choonje: No!!! Soonja! Soonja! Oh, god, she fell in the water!

Malsook: I'll save her! You stay here! *(jumps into the water and tries to find Soonja)*

Malsook: *(swims to the sinking unconscious Soonja) (She catches her and hands her over to Choonje)* Here! Get her on the boat!

Choonje: *(putting Soonja back on the boat)* I got her! Now, you come up!

*The moment Malsook tries to get on the boat, there is a lightening. A huge wave comes along and moves Malsook far away from the boat.*

Soonja: NO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Malsook: Go! Go! Leave without me!

Soonja: NO! NO! I'm not leaving without you! *(tries to jump in the water, but Choonje holds her from the back)* Let go of me! Let go of me! No!

Malsook: LEAVE! NOW!

Eric: Come, Soonja, we have to go! Or we'll all die!

*Choonje, sobbing, takes control of the ship and unwillingly turns the ship around and sets off, leaving Malsook behind. Soonja is begging to go back. Choonje does not respond, biting his lip as he continues to head towards shore. Malsook sinks down to the bottom of the water. Lights slowly go off.*

Narration: That was the day when I first really got to know her. That was the day when I first really got to open up myself. That was the day when I first really started to love the sea. And she was gone that first day when I started to change. I cried for days and days after that day, like I've never cried before. And that was the last time I ever saw Malsook.

### < Scene 8 >

*Scene changes to funeral. Malbong is crying his lungs out. Soonja is crying silently on the side.*

Malbong: MALSOOOOOOOOOK!!! *(crying hard)* It's all my fault! It's all my fault you died!!!

*Choonje walks over to Soonja. He sits down next to her.*

Choonje: Hey.

Soonja: Hey.

Choonje: I'm sorry ... I knew you wanted to save her ...

Soonja: *(cutting him)* I could have saved her! I could have saved her! You coward! You were scared that you'd die if you jumped in the water! *(cries)* She died because of me! If only I didn't fall off the boat... If only jumped in the water... *(crying)*

Choonje: It's not your fault. She saved you because she wanted to. She died happy. You would have made her even more miserable if you jumped in to save her.

Soonja: I can't forgive myself ... I can't ... I never tried to open up to her. She always tried to show me new things, teach me about the sea, and be like a mother to me. And yesterday, when I finally came to understand her, I never got to say sorry... I never got to thank her ...

Choonje: Look, it's not your fault. It's okay. If she's the woman I remember, she'll understand. And I know she wouldn't want you to blame yourself like this. *(pats Soonja on the shoulder. Soonja starts crying on Choonje's shoulder)* It's not your fault.

*Light slowly goes off. Spotlight on Lydia.*

Narration: I really did think it was my fault. And it was until years later that I finally understood what he meant when he said it wasn't my fault. It took me a long time to forgive myself, but eventually, I did. *(pause)* I missed her a lot. And I still do. I still remember her smiling face, glowing under the sun, letting me see the beauty of the sea. And if she was here today, I'd tell her I thank her from the bottom of my heart for being a teacher, a friend, and a mother to me.

*Choonje, as Soonja's husband, enters the room. He is now around 40 and is wearing a suit.*

Choonje: Hey honey. Have you seen my tie around here? *(looks at the haenyeo suit in Lydia's hands)* Wait, is that your haenyeo suit?

Lydia: Yeah, I found it in my closet here.

Choonje: Oh god, it's been like forever since I first saw you in that.

Lydia: Yeah ... *(smiling)*

Choonje: Oh, I remember. Hey, did it hurt?

Lydia: *(smiling)* Did what hurt?

Choonje: When you fell from heaven?

Lydia: Hmm... no. I'm used to it now.

Choonje: Oh, are you? Hahaha. *(starts walking towards the door)* Come, the kids are waiting.

Lydia: Go ahead. I'll be there.

*Lydia puts her suit next to her cheek. She breaths in deeply, then breaths out. She smiles. She puts the suit back in the closet and exits stage.*

*Scene.*